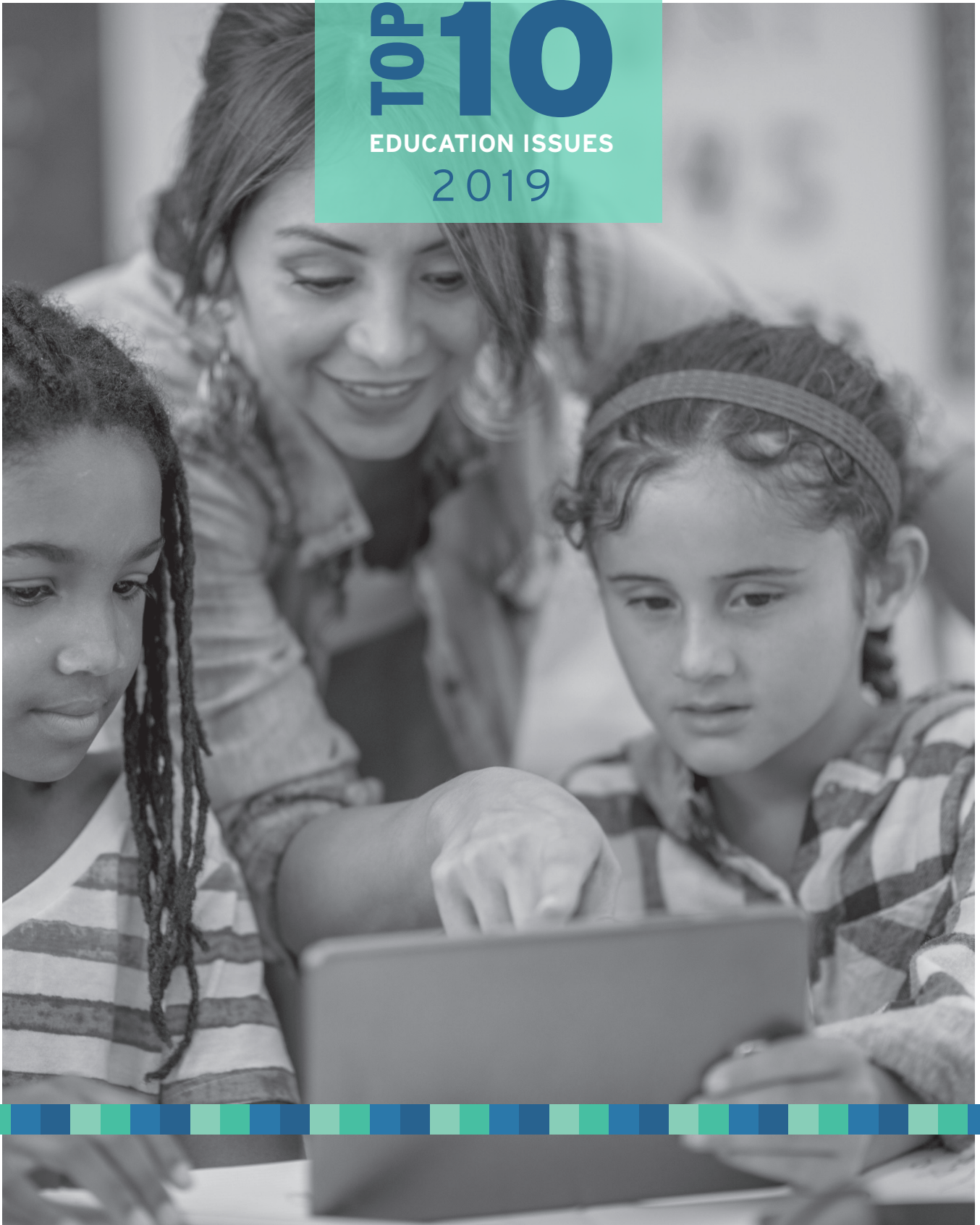


TOP 10

EDUCATION ISSUES
2019



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INTRODUCTION

It's been said elections have consequences. That certainly rings true here in North Carolina as the results of the midterm elections are ushering in big changes that will likely have significant impact on education policy.

In November, voters put an end to the Republican's veto-proof supermajority in the General Assembly that has existed for the past six years. Democratic Governor Roy Cooper has not shied away from using his veto pen the last two years, even though in most cases it only had a symbolic effect. Now, veto overrides will be tougher to come by and may result in greater cooperation, greater gridlock or something in between.

As we began preparing our Top Ten Education Issues for 2019, it became clear that this year has the potential to be one of the most consequential periods in our state's history when it comes to how public schools are funded.

The General Assembly's Joint Legislative Task Force on Education Finance Reform is expected to continue its work with a legislative deadline of October 2019 to propose an overhaul of how our state funds schools. At the same time, the Governor's Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education is expected to wrap up its fact-finding work and receive recommendations from the outside experts hired by the court to propose remedies in the now 20+ years long *Leandro* case. That's why "Seize Historic Opportunity to Advance Adequacy and Equity in School Funding" landed near the top of our Top Ten list.

There are some other familiar themes in this year's list, including racial equity, teacher recruitment and retention and the lack of transparency and accountability in the state's private school voucher program. While all of these are critical issues for our state to tackle, our #1 issue for 2019 is "Renew North Carolina's Commitment to Public Schools for the Public Good."

Public schools have, for generations, played a critical role in the lives of the vast majority of North Carolinians—they are ingrained into the fabric of our identity as a state. We believe, and evidence shows, that's a good thing. Public education is one of the few institutions left where we all still come together regardless of color, religion and wealth. We need that now more than ever. Many of the issues in our Top Ten highlight where we see the erosion of our historic commitment to public schools for the public good.

For example, this year we include the impact of the rapidly growing number of charter schools in the state. The charter landscape looks very different now than in the early days when charters were sold as "laboratories of innovation" to incubate new teaching practices and school models to improve traditional public schools, not to become competitors. The impact of charters on our public school districts needs to be better understood and some policy changes considered. We are very troubled by the possible creation of municipally-run charter schools and how they may exacerbate racial and socioeconomic fault lines.

Another new addition to our Top Ten Education Issues is a focus on the needs of our state's rural communities. North Carolina has the second largest rural student population in the United States. These communities share similar challenges, including difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers and coping with scarce local resources due to small, and in many cases, shrinking tax bases. Without serious attention from lawmakers, we fear these schools and students will fall further behind.

In the end, we seek what's best for our state and especially our state's children. Occasionally that means we will call out policies we believe undermine public education and hurt our state. We'll also applaud when things are done well. We welcome debates, discussions and coffee too. So let's move into 2019 realistic about the scope of the challenges, but also committed to rising to meet them.



RENEW NORTH CAROLINA'S COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

1

- › Strengthen our commitment to traditional public schools, educators, and students
- › Shift the narrative surrounding traditional public schools
- › Listen to the voices of students, educators, parents, communities

TARGET RURAL NORTH CAROLINA'S UNIQUE EDUCATION CHALLENGES

2

- › Address rural funding challenges through school finance reforms
- › Focus attention on rural teacher recruitment and retention
- › Address the broadband access gap for our students

DIRECTLY ADDRESS PERSISTENT RACIAL INEQUITIES IN NORTH CAROLINA'S SCHOOLS

3

- › Invest in ongoing teacher training to foster racial equity
- › Create effective pathways to promoting greater diversity in our teacher pipeline
- › (Re) Commit to creating and sustaining integrated schools and classrooms

SEIZE HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY TO ADVANCE ADEQUACY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOL FUNDING

4

- › Prepare for implementation of the *Leandro* remedial process
- › Prioritize adequacy and equity in all efforts to reshape North Carolina's school finance system
- › Prepare a bond referendum for 2020 to address infrastructure needs

RECOGNIZE THAT TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STARTS WITH PROFESSIONAL TREATMENT

5

- › Improve educator pay and reinstate policies and programs that professionalize teaching
- › Target teacher recruitment and retention efforts to benefit high-need students
- › Set demanding but reasonable standards for teacher preparation programs
- › Extend limited categories of teacher contracts to 11 months with additional supports

TOP 10

EDUCATION ISSUES

2019 SUMMARY

6

STRENGTHEN CHARTER SCHOOL AND PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHER TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- › Require impact analyses on segregation for new charter school applicants
- › Determine actual funding and impact of charter schools on traditional public school budgets
- › Implement real accountability and transparency in NC Opportunity Scholarship Program
- › Repeal and replace Innovative School District and expand Restart School model with state support
- › End virtual charter school pilot program

7

ELIMINATE STRESS AND STIGMA IN TESTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

- › Reduce testing anxiety for students and educators
- › Eliminate the faulty A-F school grading system
- › Consider multiple forms of assessment to measure student, teacher, and school success

8

START AT THE TOP BY INVESTING IN SCHOOL LEADERS

- › Fix the new principal pay plan
- › Restore retiree health benefits for future educators and state employees
- › Provide principals with the support personnel they need to ensure students can learn

9

THOUGHTFULLY AND STRATEGICALLY INVEST IN SCHOOL SAFETY

- › Dramatically increase funding for and access to school-based mental health supports
- › Provide resources for school security infrastructure updates
- › Reject any efforts to arm teachers or utilize armed volunteers on campuses
- › Be thoughtful about directing funds towards interventions that research has shown to have negligible, mixed, or negative impacts on learning environments
- › The elephant in the room – let's have a real conversation about gun access

10

FOCUS ON WHOLE CHILD, WHOLE DAY

- › Dramatically increase funding for and access to school-based mental health supports
- › Invest in training for trauma-sensitive schools and classrooms
- › Expand access to out-of-school programs, especially in rural communities and for low-income youth
- › Expand access to early childhood education through universal Pre-K

1

RENEW NORTH CAROLINA'S COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

The establishment of a system of taxpayer-funded public schools accessible to all is one of America's greatest achievements. Publicly funded education evolved in this country to not only serve the needs of individuals, but also to promulgate the understanding that having a well-educated citizenry is a collective good that is critically important to the protection of our democracy and the success of our economy.

Public education benefits all members of society in myriad ways, regardless of whether they have children in public schools. Having a strong system of public education is associated with increased economic growth, lower rates of unemployment, higher tax revenues, improved public health, greater civic participation, lower levels of inequality, and reductions in crime. Public schools are one—if not the only—institution in our society that can bring individuals together from all walks of life, across socioeconomic, racial, and religious lines, to learn and grow together. In our increasingly diverse society, those who comprise the “public” that our schools serve today and who will lead our country in the future is changing, making it more important than ever that we implement policies that will finally guarantee equitable educational opportunity for all students. An equitable system of education is, in this way, the ultimate public good—in that it is provided to all members of society for the overall well-being of the public.

North Carolinians know this to be true. A 2015 study commissioned by the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation found that the vast majority of North Carolinians believe that public education is critically important

to this state and its future. This same survey also revealed that North Carolina residents are increasingly concerned about the lack of support for public education at the state level—and their concerns are warranted.

In recent years, some state-level policy decisions have discredited and devalued our public schools. North Carolina now ranks among the lowest in the country for both per-pupil expenditures and teacher pay. Schools are rapidly becoming more segregated and unequal. Our state accountability system stigmatizes schools serving our most disadvantaged students instead of providing the resources that they need to be successful. Instead, privatization schemes in the form of vouchers and for-profit charter school chains have been touted as the alternative to under resourced public schools. Thanks to a lack of oversight, these reforms often fail to ensure high quality educational alternatives and instead contribute to resegregation and siphon our tax dollars away from the public and into the hands of for-profit entities. The emphasis on nebulous values of proficiency, choice, and competition have, in many ways, led us astray from the intended purposes of public schools to serve the public good. And remarkably, the narrative that surrounds public education these days has often blamed individual students, parents, teachers, and school leaders for perceived failures, when in reality we should be shining a light on broader systems of inequity and the systematic dismantling of support for and trust in our schools.

Public schools have, for generations, played a critical role in the lives of the vast majority of North

State lawmakers have increased funding for school choice programs by 146% between 2013 and 2018, compared with a spending increase for public schools of only 17% during the same time period.

SOURCE: NC DPI ONLINE STATISTICAL PROFILE



Carolínians—they are ingrained into the fabric of our identity as a state. In addition to our K-12 system, we have one of the largest networks of community colleges in the country, and of course, we are home to the nation's first public university and one of the most well-regarded state university systems in the country. K-12 schools are the single largest employer in the majority of North Carolina counties. The vast majority of North Carolina residents attend or have attended traditional public schools, and for so many of us, our experiences in school helped to shape us into who we are today.

In a political environment that often does not value or adequately support traditional public education, our North Carolina public school students and educators

make us proud every day—but they need and deserve much better. We begin our Top Ten for this year, therefore, with asking our state leaders to remember the value of public education in our society. It is past time to reverse course on our state's recent pattern of disinvesting in public schools, and instead commit to implementing policies and increasing funding levels that will ensure that all of our children have equitable access to a rigorous education that will prepare them to be the thoughtful, empathetic, and creative leaders that we need for our future. Public schools are pillars of strong communities, and supporting them is key to the future well-being of our state. It's in all of our best interest.

With the rise of resegregation and inequality in education, we have sown the seeds for the undoing of public education altogether. We lost the moral message of public schools: that they are about a common, not an individual, good. NIKOLE HANNAH-JONES, *THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE*

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2019

- **Strengthen our commitment to traditional public schools, educators, and students.** We must have a renewed attention to the importance of public education for the public good. Public schools should be equipped to serve the diverse needs of all students for the betterment of all of society, not just the privileged few.
- **Shift the narrative surrounding traditional public schools** away from one that stigmatizes schools as “failing,” when we should instead be placing pressure on lawmakers to reverse past policies

that have all but ensured that the public education system will struggle to serve its intended purpose. Let's lift up the many strengths and successes of our amazing North Carolina teachers and students and provide them with sufficient resources to reach even greater levels of success.

- **Listen to the voices of students, educators, parents, communities,** and ensure that all are at the table when it comes to policy and decision-making in education, especially those who historically have been the most marginalized.

2

TARGET RURAL NORTH CAROLINA'S UNIQUE EDUCATION CHALLENGES

North Carolina has often been touted as a site of rapid population and economic growth due to its highly desirable location for businesses and families to settle. But this growth and prosperity has not happened uniformly across the state, and in fact, NC remains one of the most rural states in the nation.

North Carolina is home to 568,000 rural students, the second largest rural student population in the United States, after Texas. Eighty of North Carolina's 100 counties are classified as rural - 40 percent of all NC public school students reside in rural counties - and 87 of the state's 115 traditional K-12 public school districts are located in rural counties.

Rural North Carolina has been hard hit by major structural changes in the economy that have taken place over the last few decades, including automation, industry consolidation and offshoring. Consequently, our state has become "two North Carolinas." In one North Carolina, people live in largely urban areas that are attractive to industries and job growth. The other North Carolina is made up of largely rural communities generally in a state of economic decline.

Today, 734,000 rural North Carolinians have household incomes below the federal poverty level, which makes up 18 percent of the population of the 80

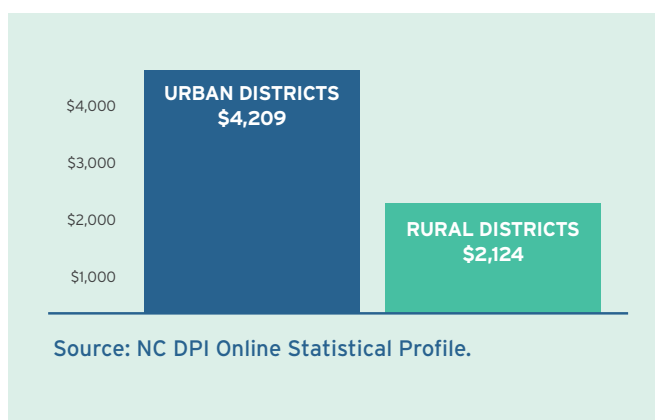
counties in our state designated as rural. For a family of four, that's a household income of less than \$25,100 in 2018. If you move the line up to just 150 percent of the federal poverty level—a level described as "asset poor," meaning a household's inability to access wealth resources that are sufficient to provide for basic needs for a period of three months—the figure reaches 1.2 million, a full third of North Carolina's rural population.

This challenging economic climate in rural North Carolina has had a dramatic impact on educational opportunities and outcomes. Look no further than North Carolina's A-F school grading system, where 98 percent of the schools receiving Fs last year had student populations that were anywhere from 41 percent to 100 percent economically disadvantaged. Only 20 percent of schools receiving As educated similar proportions of disadvantaged students.

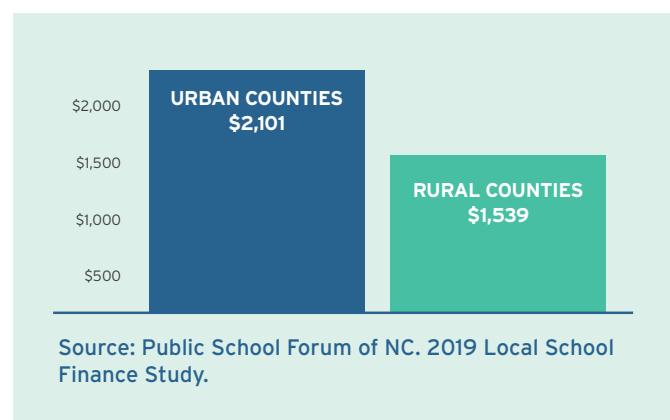
Research confirms the impact of poverty on academic achievement is both significant and starts early. Children living in poverty are less likely to have adequate resources at home, have less access to enriching activities outside of school, and are more likely to drop out or never attend college.

One of the most severe effects of poverty in the United States is that poor children enter school

AVERAGE LOCAL TEACHER SALARY SUPPLEMENT (2017-2018)



AVERAGE LOCAL INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS (PER ADM) (2016-2017)





with a readiness gap, and it grows as they get older. This trend disproportionately affects rural students because they tend to come from poorer households. In North Carolina, 62 percent of rural, non-metro students qualify for free or reduced lunch compared to 46 percent for urban students. Given the pervasive poverty in rural North Carolina, it's probably not surprising we have the 18th lowest rural 4th grade reading scores in the nation.

Students living in poverty can and do succeed with the proper support, which should include highly effective teachers, excellent school leaders and adequately funded schools with rich and challenging curricula. Here again, rural communities are at a disadvantage because of their smaller property tax bases that fuel local investment in schools.

North Carolina is home to **568,000 rural students**, the second largest rural student population in the United States.

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2019

> **Address rural funding challenges through school finance reforms.**

The state's current education funding system, including the Low-Wealth and Small County Supplemental Funding programs, are insufficient given the growing gap in education support across the state—they must be augmented to properly address need. These funding disparities have tangible impacts in classrooms. In low-wealth districts with fewer resources, class offerings often lack the diversity of those found in wealthier ones. For example, rural districts in North Carolina have less than half the number of high school AP course offerings of urban districts - 5.8 versus 11.9. Lawmakers and policymakers should factor in rural school funding gaps and design/adjust funding formulas commensurately.

> **Focus attention on rural teacher recruitment and retention.**

Local salary supplements for educators are larger in urban, high-wealth districts, which better positions them to attract and retain top talent. The difference is dramatic. For the 2017-18 school year, the average annual local teacher supplement in the state's rural school districts was \$2,124. For non-rural districts, it was nearly twice that amount with an

average of \$4,209. This at least partially explains why 25 of the 30 districts with the highest teacher turnover rates are rural. We must increase state support so that it boosts teacher pay in rural counties. The state should also encourage and financially support "grow your own" and place-based teacher education programs that support students who wish to teach in their own hometowns.

> **Address the broadband access gap for our students.**

North Carolina has much to be proud of when it comes to our nation-leading investments in school connectivity, but there remain broadband access gaps - sometimes referred to as the homework gap - outside of school. The primary causes are affordability and access. The NC Broadband Infrastructure Office estimates 10 to 20 percent of our K-12 students do not have broadband internet access at home. According to the FCC, 6.29% of North Carolina households do not have access to high speed broadband. Ninety-five percent of these disconnected households are in rural areas of the state. We must develop a well thought out plan to ensure all of our students can connect to the internet outside of school.

3

DIRECTLY ADDRESS PERSISTENT RACIAL INEQUITIES IN NORTH CAROLINA'S SCHOOLS

North Carolina, like the United States as a whole, is now more racially and ethnically diverse than ever before, and this is particularly true of our public school population. The diversity of North Carolina is an incredible asset when it comes to the educational experiences of our children and the future of our state.

A wealth of education research has shown that students who learn in diverse settings have improved cognitive, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills; are more empathetic, civically engaged, open-minded and engaged in class; and are less likely to exhibit racial bias. Cross-cultural skills are in high demand in the workforce, as top business leaders across the country are seeking to hire graduates from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds who have had experience working and learning with peers from experiences and perspectives that are different from their own. Diversity in our state and our schools is good for us all, and in light of this, the future of North Carolina looks bright.

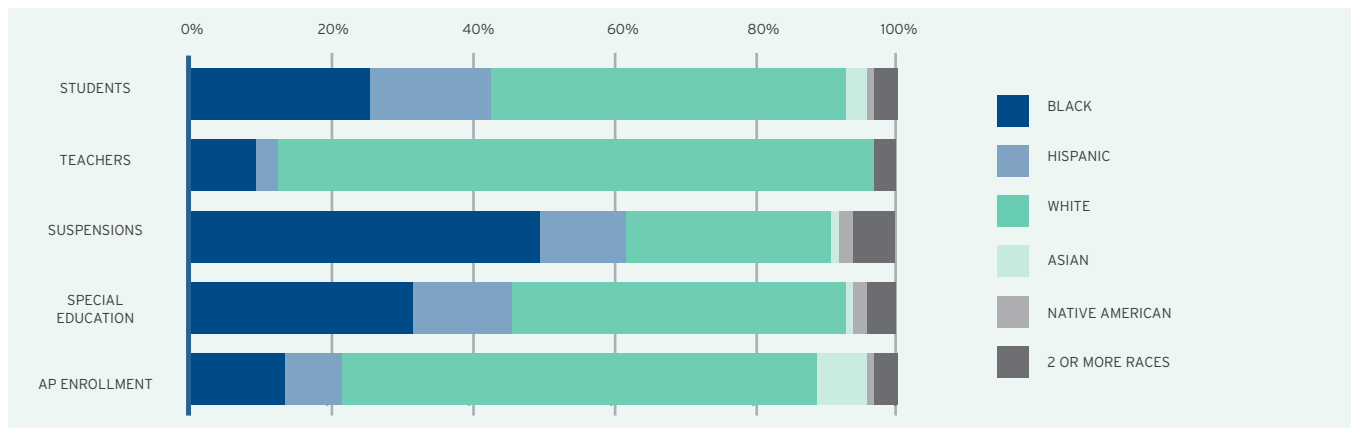
While our student population has become increasingly diverse, our schools are becoming more segregated, and the racial background of a student continues to be a strong predictor of where they attend school and what resources and opportunities they receive. In 2016, the Public School Forum published its Study Group XVI report on Expanding Educational Opportunity in North Carolina, which included a set of recommendations

to address seven key issues: resegregation, racial discipline disparities, the opportunity gap, unequal access to advanced courses, lack of teacher diversity, overrepresentation of students of color in special education, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Since then, little effort has been made at the state level to address disparities that create barriers to academic success and social mobility for many Black, Hispanic and Native American students.

While North Carolina, like the rest of the country, has a painful past and present when it comes to racial inequity in our schools, there are also parts of our history of which we should be proud. For years, our state boasted some of the most desegregated schools in the country. Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Wake County and other districts led the way in building racially diverse and high-quality public schools throughout much of the late 20th century. However, in recent years, segregation in districts across the state has increased dramatically, contributing to greater inequity in educational opportunities and outcomes. The growth of charter schools, which are more racially isolated than traditional public schools in North Carolina,¹ has further exacerbated resegregation. In our increasingly multicultural state, it would be a true shame for North Carolina school communities to continue down the path towards resegregation, depriving students of the benefits of diverse learning

RACIAL / ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN NC SCHOOLS

SOURCES: PROPUBLICA, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS



¹ <https://www.ncjustice.org/publications/stymied-by-segregation-how-integration-can-transform-nc-schools>

environments and restricting access for many to adequately resourced public schools.

Of course, diversity is not the end goal, as racial inequities often still persist in integrated schools. Segregation is often re-created within diverse schools as a result of the under-representation of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students in advanced courses and the over-representation of Black students enrolled in special education. Discipline disparities by race are stark and alarming—Black students are over four times as likely to be suspended than white students in North Carolina,² which can lead to loss of instructional time and emotional trauma for these students. And despite



strong evidence that having exposure to same-race teachers can improve academic success and social-emotional development for students of color, and can help reduce racial disparities in discipline and course enrollment,³ the teaching force in North Carolina remains over 80 percent white and increasingly non-representative of our student population.

For a variety of moral and economic reasons, the persistent racial inequity in our schools should be a clarion call to state and local policymakers that it is past time to implement policies that will effectively and fairly serve the needs of ALL students in our state to lead us to a more just, equitable, and successful future.

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2019

➤ **Invest in ongoing teacher training to foster racial equity.** First, the state must invest in ongoing and in-depth training for all teachers, school administrators, and support staff that helps to reduce racial bias and promotes cross-racial and cross-cultural understanding, inclusiveness, and high expectations for all. Teacher professional development and preparation programs should emphasize training in tried and true, evidence-based practices focused on promoting racial equity such as: culturally responsive pedagogy, restorative justice, and implicit bias training.

➤ **Create effective pathways to promoting greater diversity in our teacher pipeline.** Research has shown that a diverse teacher workforce is beneficial for all students. Our state must invest in and implement effective policies and programs to recruit and retain teachers who are increasingly more representative of our student population. First, the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program should be expanded to include programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Second, when considering alternative pathways to teaching, we should focus on programs that have been shown to

have strong records of recruitment and retention for teachers of color, such as high quality teacher residencies and grow-your-own programs. We must expand access to scholarships, loan forgiveness programs, and assistance for the cost of licensure exams to eliminate financial barriers in the teacher pipeline. And finally, providing mentoring and support before and after teachers enter the classroom is critical for retention.

➤ **(Re) Commit to creating and sustaining integrated schools and classrooms.** All children deserve equal access to high-quality educational opportunities and the well-established benefits of attending diverse schools. Our school districts and communities should do what they can to promote integration through student assignment policies—something through which parts of North Carolina have seen progress in the past. In addition, public dollars should not be used to support the establishment of municipal charter schools that demographic data clearly indicates threaten that threaten to lead to even further segregation and inequity across schools.

² <https://projects.propublica.org/miseducation/>

³ Gershenson et.al. (2018). "The Long-Run Impact of Same-Race Teachers." National Bureau of Economic Research.; Lindsay et.al. (2017). "Teacher Race and School Discipline." Education Next.; Egalite et.al. (2015) "Representation in the classroom: The effect of own-race teachers on student achievement." Economics of Education Review.

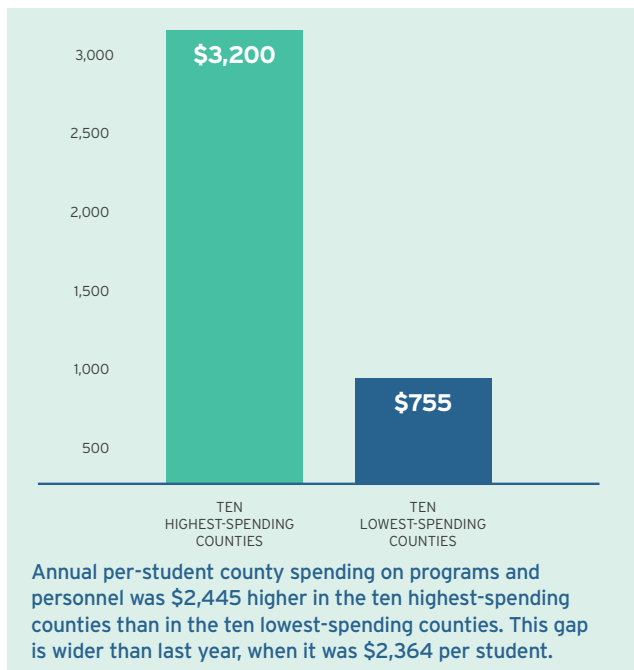
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SEIZE HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY TO ADVANCE ADEQUACY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOL FUNDING

Last year, the General Assembly embarked on a journey to reexamine how North Carolina funds public schools. In our 2018 Top Ten Education Issues, we highlighted how North Carolina's school finance system is unique. Spelled out by our state constitution, Machinery Acts (1933) and *Leandro* court rulings is the notion that it is the state's responsibility, as opposed to the duty of local districts, to adequately fund public education.

While this model offers the opportunity to better equalize the distribution of resources to schools across the state, North Carolina is not fulfilling its constitutional duty to provide adequate funding for all schools. Last year, the state ranked 39th in per-pupil spending and our funding formula remained 7.9 percent shy of where it was a decade earlier, adjusted for inflation. This is a result of deliberate funding choices made by state lawmakers. North Carolina was only one of seven states that made cuts to K-12 spending from 2008-2018⁴ and, during the same time period, cut personal and corporate income tax rates, depleting the base of resources available to adequately fund schools.

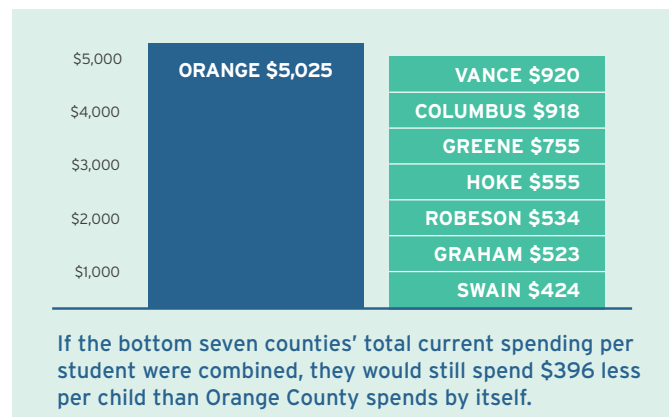
COUNTY-LEVEL SPENDING PER STUDENT (2016-17)



In 2018, the General Assembly also continued a years-long pattern of massive cuts to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Since 2008, DPI has borne an estimated \$29 million in cuts, the equivalent of approximately 300 staff positions. In 2018 alone, the agency was forced to cut \$5.1 million on top of \$3.2 million the preceding year, even while the state enjoyed budget surpluses. State agency cuts have hurt struggling schools the most—DPI's Educator Support Services (now "District and Regional Support"), which provided direct support to low-performing schools, was decimated by last year's budget reductions, with 40 of the 61 positions eliminated at DPI coming from Educator Support Services in 2018.

As a result of inadequate funding from the state, additional burdens have been placed on local governments to make up the difference. School districts in economically thriving counties are better able to leverage local resources to offer attractive salary supplements; support schools and classrooms by investing in textbooks, supplies, and other resources; and to maintain school buildings and meet other capital needs. In poorer counties, additional local investments are not enough to bridge the gap. Even though the ten poorest counties tax themselves at nearly double the rate of the ten wealthiest counties, they still generate substantially lower revenue. Other factors, ranging from

SPENDING DISPARITIES (2016-17)



⁴<https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/a-punishing-decade-for-school-funding>



the K-3 class size mandate to school safety concerns to natural disasters have had major impacts on local educational infrastructure needs that were already strained.

Equity considerations in school finance must also address gaps in funding for students with different levels of need, including low-income students, students with disabilities, and English language learners. The state should direct resources to struggling schools and support programs that encourage the state's best teachers and principals to serve students with the most pronounced educational needs.

In 2018, work by several entities ramped up in ways that may soon lead to fundamental shifts in the state's funding for public schools. In the landmark court case

Leandro v. State, Judge David Lee ordered independent consultant WestEd to create an in-depth report, to be released in 2019, which will review and analyze North Carolina's performance on the dimensions of adequacy and equity in school finance.

Separately, the Governor's Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education has been examining the key areas highlighted in the Leandro case and will engage in implementation of the remedial process. In addition, the General Assembly's Joint Legislative Task Force on Education Finance Reform is considering major overhaul to the state's school finance system based on a weighted student funding formula, with a final report due in October 2019.

In 2018, North Carolina's state formula **funding remained 7.9 percent shy of where it was a decade earlier**, adjusted for inflation.

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2019

- › **Prepare for implementation of the *Leandro* remedial process.** It is imperative that the Governor, the State Board of Education, DPI, and the General Assembly be prepared to act on the recommendations of the independent consultant, and to reconcile them with the separate work being done by the Governor's Commission and the Joint Legislative Task Force. It is past time the state move toward satisfying its obligation to provide every North Carolina child with a sound basic education.
- › **Prioritize adequacy and equity in all efforts to reshape North Carolina's school finance system.** A consistent theme raised in meetings of those engaged in the examination of our state's school funding model, has been the need to focus on adequacy and equity in considering changes to the state's school finance system and the distribution

of resources. Reports from each of these entities are due in 2019, so we will soon have an opportunity to see how well the efforts of each group honor these priorities.

- › **Prepare a bond referendum for 2020 to adequately address infrastructure needs.** Last year, DPI estimated the statewide need at \$8 billion for school construction costs over the next few years. Historically, the state has passed a bond referendum every ten years for capital construction. The last such bond was passed more than 20 years ago, in 1996. Both the House and Senate introduced companion bills with bipartisan support in 2017, but the bills languished in 2018. House Speaker Tim Moore has pledged to introduce a new bond bill in 2019, although the initial figure of \$1.3 billion for K-12 education is inadequate given the estimated need.

5

RECOGNIZE THAT TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STARTS WITH PROFESSIONAL TREATMENT

Countries from South Korea to Greece to New Zealand have earned praise for placing a high value on teachers, elevating them to a professional status not seen here in the United States. In China and Malaysia, esteem for teachers is on par with that of doctors. Singapore and Finland consistently attract the most qualified graduates into teaching. In these countries, teachers tend to be well-paid, deeply trusted, and highly respected for the expertise they bring to their classrooms.

Not so in the United States, where this year, for the first time since a PDK poll began tracking attitudes toward public schools more than half a century ago, a majority of respondents said they did not want their children to go into teaching. Reasons teaching has become a less attractive career option include persistently low salaries and fewer benefits, government mandates that restrict teachers' discretion over what they teach.

In North Carolina, the situation for teachers is particularly dire. The state ranks 37th in average teacher pay and 39th in per-student spending. During the recent Great Recession, North Carolina's public schools bore the brunt of state budget cuts. At the time, politicians said economic realities were to blame—but as national and state economies roared back to life, public education here took a back seat to other priorities—including massive corporate tax cuts. Teacher salaries have gone up, which is good news, but not enough to bring us anywhere near where we were in 2001-02, when North Carolina was ranked 19th nationally in teacher pay. Adjusted for inflation, teacher salaries are still down 9.4 percent since 2009.

In recent years, North Carolina lawmakers have further disinvested in public education despite a strengthening economy. In the last decade, they eliminated teacher tenure (known here as career status), Master's degree salary supplements, longevity pay, and retiree health benefits for teachers who will begin their careers in 2021. They also cut funding for classroom resources, textbooks, and teaching assistants; and ignored pleas for a statewide bond for facilities, contributing to awful conditions for teaching and learning in many schools.

This continuing trend of ignoring public school needs has persisted in tandem with increased funding for private school vouchers, significant expansion of charter schools, and the introduction of an achievement-based system of grading public schools that correlates strongly with student poverty rather than school performance, thereby discouraging teachers from working in high-need schools.

A positive step last year—restoration of the well-respected NC Teaching Fellows program—has fallen well short of expectations so far. In its first year, the program enrolled 74 students, less than half of what the budget was intended to support and far fewer than the 500 students enrolled annually before the General Assembly eliminated the original program in 2011.

All of this has generated considerable disillusionment among current teachers and has discouraged those who might have considered teaching from entering the profession. The overall state teacher attrition rate rose slightly to 13.45 percent last year. Nearly one in ten

Teacher salaries went up, but not enough to bring us anywhere near where we were in 2001-02, when **North Carolina was ranked 19th nationally in teacher salary**. Adjusted for inflation, teacher salaries are still down 9.4 percent since 2009.

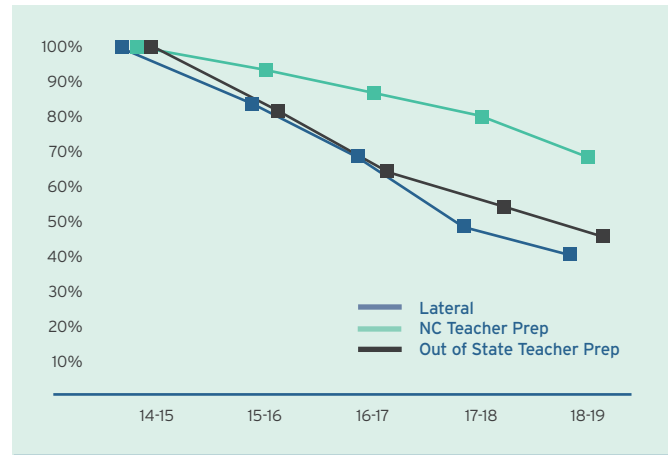


teachers who left said they planned to teach in another state (767 teachers), more than double the number who left for out-of-state teaching jobs in 2010-11. Beginning teachers and those in the highest-need areas of the state have been among those most affected by the devaluing of and disinvestment in teaching as a profession. Nearly half of all teachers who left the profession to pursue other careers were in their first five years of teaching. And the highest rates of attrition in the state are in high-need districts along the I-95 corridor, with some of those districts experiencing more than double the statewide average attrition rate.

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2019

- > **Improve educator pay and reinstate policies and programs that professionalize teaching.** North Carolina needs ongoing, significant annual increases in educator pay to restore North Carolina's status as a teaching destination. But higher pay alone is not enough. It is also imperative to invest in programs that restore trust and respect for teaching as a profession, such as master's pay, retirement health benefits, and robust funding for teacher training programs and teacher professional development.
- > **Target teacher recruitment and retention efforts to benefit high-need students.** Policymakers should introduce incentives that encourage excellent teachers to work in hard-to-staff subjects in schools serving large percentages of high-need students. In addition to offering direct monetary incentives to these teachers, the state should amend the accountability system to reward teachers who excel in challenging circumstances. The new NC Teaching Fellows Program should expand and include our HBCU educator preparation programs, with a concerted focus on attracting more male and minority teaching candidates, and with a specific aim to benefit high-need students. In addition, the

PERSISTENCE BY PREPARATION PROGRAM



SOURCE: [HTTPS://FILES.NC.GOV/GOVERNOR/TOMBERLIN_PRESENTATION_STATE_OF_THE_TEACHING_PROFESSION_COMMISSION_12-4-18.PDF](https://files.nc.gov/governor/tomberlin/presentation_state_of_the_teaching_profession_commission_12-4-18.pdf)

General Assembly should restore significant funding for supports for the state's struggling schools.

- > **Set demanding but reasonable standards for teacher preparation programs.** It is imperative that the work of the Professional Educator Preparation & Standards Commission leads to the maintenance of rigorous standards for North Carolina educators while eliminating barriers to entry to the teaching profession that do not improve teaching and student outcomes. We must guard against efforts to lower standards or scrimp on preparation simply to find warm bodies.
- > **Extend limited categories of teacher contracts to 11 months with additional supports.** The General Assembly should automatically grant beginning teachers and teachers in low-performing schools 11-month contracts with additional pay. Schools should use the extended year to support struggling students, increase planning time, and offer intensive, job-embedded professional development opportunities and mentoring for teachers, focused on their unique needs as beginning teachers or serving struggling students.

6

STRENGTHEN CHARTER SCHOOL AND PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHER TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In the last decade, North Carolina has seen an explosion of educational options that fall under the umbrella known as school choice. These initiatives have been lifted up by policymakers as a means toward improving public education, but the evidence has suggested they have failed to fulfill this promise.

Charter schools are the largest and most well established of the school choice efforts in North Carolina. The Public School Forum, as well as other education groups, backed the 1996 law that created charter schools here, with the understanding that they would serve as “laboratories of innovation” that would allow the state to explore new school designs, curricula and teaching methods. Many excellent charter schools opened prior to 2011 that have served and continued to serve thousands of students well. But charter schools were sold to policymakers and the public as a way to improve public education. Have they?

More than 20 years after the first charter school opened in North Carolina, there is scant evidence to show that any educational innovations developed in charter schools have been transferred to traditional public schools. Certainly policies like school calendar and school day flexibility, as well as budget and staffing autonomy, are all hallmarks of today’s NC charter school sector. But while these are policies that many traditional public school leaders would like to implement as well, their requests have largely been ignored or met with increased micro-management. The recent legislation empowering Rowan-Salisbury Schools with more flexibility is promising.

The number of charter schools in North Carolina has nearly doubled since 2011, when lawmakers lifted the 100-school cap. This has had a huge impact on small, rural school districts that become further strained by the financial implications of a large exodus of students to charter schools.

Another problematic development: national for-profit management companies are finding North Carolina to be fertile ground to establish and replicate charter schools across the state, yet they tend to offer educational options that don’t live up to the promise of offering something different than what local public schools already provide. These charters often operate with private contracts and real estate agreements with sister companies, allowing public dollars to be skimmed away from classrooms and the public eye. Unlike the early years of charter schools, when most were home-grown, **today one-fifth of North Carolina’s charter schools are operated by for-profit charter management organizations, 80 percent of which are headquartered outside of the state.**

Since 2014, two virtual charter schools that are managed by major for-profit companies have also opened in North Carolina thanks to legislation passed by the General Assembly that enabled them to participate in a 4-year pilot program. Much like their counterparts in other states, Connections Academy

TOP TEN VOUCHER SCHOOLS, BY \$

VOUCHER SCHOOL	TOTAL PUBLIC DOLLARS RECEIVED, TO DATE
Trinity Christian School, Fayetteville	\$2,714,670
Greensboro Islamic Academy	\$1,882,650
Fayetteville Christian School	\$1,711,318
Word of God Christian Academy, Raleigh	\$1,677,960
Liberty Christian School, Richlands	\$1,549,000
Berean Baptist Academy, Fayetteville Monroe	\$1,352,179
Tabernacle Christian School,	\$1,323,391
Victory Christian Center School, Monroe	\$1,171,091
Mount Zion Christian Academy, Durham	\$1,110,480
Raleigh Christian Academy	\$1,094,244
	\$15,586,983



(Pearson) and North Carolina Virtual Academy (K12, Inc.) have been plagued by high withdrawal rates and poor academic performance.

The NC Opportunity Scholarship Program, also known as “school vouchers,” was enacted by the General Assembly in 2013 with an initial budget of \$10 million. That budget has grown to almost \$55 million for 2018-19 and is scheduled to increase by \$10 million each year until 2026-27, when it reaches an annual budget of \$134,840,000. By then, North Carolina taxpayers will have spent more than \$1 billion on this school privatization scheme.

In terms of financial oversight, the Opportunity Scholarship Program is lacking. While private voucher

schools receiving more than \$300,000 annually in taxpayer dollars must undergo a financial review that is then submitted to the state, that requirement only captures a very small percentage of the schools that currently receive public dollars. The overwhelming majority of private voucher schools are free to spend public funds as they choose, out of the public eye.

Surely a public investment of this size demands accountability and transparency in how these funds are being spent and if they are benefiting NC students. Unfortunately after five years and almost \$85 million spent on these vouchers, we know almost nothing about what these schools teach, how their students are doing compared to traditional public school students and how the schools are spending taxpayer dollars.

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2019

- **Require impact analyses on segregation for new charter school applicants.** Data tells us that charter schools are exacerbating the trend of resegregation in our public schools thanks in part to a growing number of charters comprising either nearly all students of color or nearly all white student populations. Original charter school law required racial and ethnic diversity in charter schools, however the law has been watered down and is unmet and unenforceable.
- **Determine actual funding and impact of charter schools on traditional public school budgets.** Every year it seems we debate whether charter schools receive short shrift on funding allotments as compared with traditional public schools. It's time we settle the funding debate and develop a model that works in the best interest of all students, regardless of which type of school they attend.
- **Implement real accountability and transparency in NC Opportunity Scholarship Program.** This program needs real accountability and transparency immediately. Until lawmakers pass legislation that provides robust financial oversight and a vehicle for

the public to understand whether or not voucher students actually do better academically in private settings, we believe there should be a moratorium on increased voucher funding.

- **Repeal and replace Innovative School District and expand Restart School model with state support.** Tennessee tried a model similar to the Innovative School District, and the results have been abysmal. That should have been a red flag for NC lawmakers and prompted them to look at what happened to contribute to those failures. Instead, we are now seeing our own implementation issues including lack of community buy-in— which was the #1 problem for Tennessee.
- **End virtual charter school pilot program.** Virtual charter schools continue to under-perform and the poor results of the first three years should have been enough to stop the four-year extension granted by the General Assembly last year. Let's end this program before millions more taxpayer dollars go to waste and our children fall far behind in their education.

7

ELIMINATE STRESS AND STIGMA IN TESTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

In recent decades, education policy has largely been defined by a sharpened focus on testing and accountability for public schools. Standardized test scores have been regarded by policymakers and so-called education reformers as the gold standard for evaluating the performance of students, teachers, and schools—so much so that they can be a deciding factor in the amount of pay teachers and principals receive, whether a student earns her diploma, or even whether a school’s doors should remain open.

Critics have long called into question the extent to which we rely on test score measures to inform our understanding of school performance, teacher effectiveness, and student learning. Some education researchers have argued that test scores are not a consistently reliable or valid indicator of actual student learning, and that accountability policies as well as the tests themselves can be biased based on social-class, race/ethnicity, region, language, and other cultural factors. Similarly, experts contend that “teaching to the test” places undue focus on rudimentary skills and memorization that are no longer in demand in our technologically advanced society; we should be instead focused on fostering the creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving skills that are most associated with future success.

Recently, parents across the country have begun to push back on the preparation and time spent on testing, leading some to “opt-out” of state tests for their children. Parents and teachers alike have criticized the high-stakes nature of testing policies that has led to increased stress and anxiety for students as well as educators whose job status and pay is sometimes directly tied to their students’ performance. Testing has come under scrutiny by North Carolina policymakers as well. State Superintendent Mark Johnson has vowed to reduce the time spent on testing for students, and the State Board of Education is considering this year whether any state-administered tests should be eliminated.

None of this is to say that standardized tests do not have their place in education. Tests can be useful as a way to make uniform comparisons across students, classrooms, schools, and subgroups and shine an important light on the educational needs of historically marginalized and underserved students. They can be a useful metric through which we can assess student learning and provide teachers with an idea of areas of instruction in need of focus and improvement. But standardized tests are just that—a single, limited metric, so there are many reasons that we should look beyond these scores when evaluating learning, competence, teacher effectiveness, and school quality.

GRADES BY SCHOOL POVERTY PERCENTAGE



SOURCE: NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (2018, SEPTEMBER 5). 2017-18 PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH OF NORTH CAROLINA PUBLIC SCHOOLS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.



Further, there is little evidence that accountability policies that punish schools, educators, and students who do not meet a given testing benchmark have lived up to intended goals of improving academic achievement; in fact, these policies can sometimes do more harm than good. One such example is North Carolina's faulty and punitive A-F school grading system, which evaluates schools primarily on the basis of proficiency, or how students perform on a test at one point in time. Only 20 percent of a school's letter grade is derived from its growth score, which utilizes a complicated metric to look at how students improve on tests over time—a better reflection of how a school and its educators are helping students succeed academically. The Forum has long critiqued the use

of these grades, which are more indicative of which schools have the highest concentrations of students living in poverty than how well educators are teaching our children.

Moving forward, North Carolina's leaders should prioritize forms of assessment that evaluate the skills that matter most in the 21st century. All North Carolina students should graduate from high school having had exposure to a wide range of subjects, and should be equipped with the ability to apply higher-order thinking skills to complex, real world problems. Teachers should be trusted to do what they are trained to do—teach—with the flexibility to be creative in the classroom so that they can meet the diverse learning needs of their students.

As of 2017, only 16 states still use A-F grades for school performance, and North Carolina is the only state whose formula gives such a large weight to proficiency, rather than growth.

SOURCE: MURRAY & HOWE (2017). "NEGLECTING DEMOCRACY IN EDUCATION POLICY: A-F SCHOOL REPORT CARD ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS." EDUCATION POLICY ANALYSIS ARCHIVES.

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2019

- **Reduce testing anxiety for students and educators.** While accountability for schools is important, lawmakers should eliminate punitive policies that can create toxic, stressful school environments, place undue burdens on teachers and students, stigmatize and unfairly disadvantage those with the greatest need, and often cause more harm than good.
- **Eliminate the faulty A-F school grading system.** As of 2017, only 16 states still use A-F grades for school performance, and North Carolina is the only state whose formula gives such a large weight to proficiency rather than growth. At the very least, the General Assembly should revise the formula to emphasize growth over proficiency, but given the

stigma and stress associated with such punitive accountability tools, we'd prefer to replace the current system with one that is more equitable and reflective of multiple measures of learning.

- **Consider multiple forms of assessment to measure student, teacher, and school success.** Students need to develop knowledge far beyond what is covered by standardized tests, and multiple measures are needed to truly evaluate student learning. Alternative forms of assessment may include portfolios that collect a sample of student work over time; performance assessments that are student-centered, teacher created, and inquiry-based; classroom observations, and capstone projects.

8

START AT THE TOP BY INVESTING IN SCHOOL LEADERS

To achieve student success, we must start with investing in the tools necessary to recruit and retain the best school leaders—a strategy that our state has neglected for far too long. North Carolina’s national ranking for principal pay slipped to 50th in the nation in 2016, crystallizing the fact that it was time to reverse course.

Our General Assembly took action in 2017, putting into place a new system for compensating our school leaders that afforded many principals substantial pay raises. However, many veteran principals with decades of leading schools found themselves on track to see huge drops in compensation thanks to the plan’s shift away from valuing experience and credentials toward one that honed in on students’ progress on standardized tests. In an effort to mitigate this consequence, lawmakers have enacted two consecutive years of hold harmless legislation to prevent these pay decreases.

The new plan’s focus on performance pay not only hurts veteran school leaders, it can result in scenarios that will make it more difficult to attract and retain high quality school leaders who would consider taking on the monumental task of turning around struggling schools. For example, if two out of the last three years didn’t result in increased academic growth scores for a school, its principal would see his or her pay

reduced. This potential outcome creates a disincentive for skilled leaders to take the helm at low-performing schools, where—as many educators have pointed out—it typically takes at least five years to see improved academic outcomes.

Overall volatility of the pay plan is a concern as well. Many factors contribute to the ups and downs of a school’s academic growth scores, many of which are outside of a principal’s control, such as student characteristics and out of school factors. Principals must anticipate that their salaries could fluctuate considerably from year to year with this salary plan, which may impact recruitment and retention.

Finally, school superintendents say evaluating the performance of a principal is about much more than student performance on tests – other supervisory duties that include the ability to handle discipline, craft a solid budget, effectively handle public relations, create a culture of trust and respect, manage issues related to the needs of exceptional children, and tackling other very challenging topics, like school safety, should all be factored into evaluating a principal’s performance, which this model does not do.

North Carolina can do better to attract and retain the kind of school leadership our children deserve.





North Carolina ranked **50th in the nation in principal pay in 2016**. The average 2017-18 salary for principals moved from just under \$64,000 per year to roughly \$72,000 per year – but NC still ranked toward the bottom for principal pay among 12 southeastern states.

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2019

- › **Fix the new principal pay plan.** School administrators have spoken about what it takes to attract and retain the best leaders—let’s listen to them. Instead of continuing to extend hold harmless provisions to mitigate unfortunate consequences of this pay plan, let’s fix it wholesale. A redesigned compensation model should still value years of experience and advanced degrees, because there are significant factors in a principal’s ability to manage the complex demands of leading a school toward success. And let’s include incentives, not deterrents, for high performing principals to take over low-performing schools. All of these things can be done in combination with an element of performance pay – but it should be an element, not the driving force behind compensation.
- › **Restore retiree health benefits for future educators and state employees.** As we stated last year, this benefit—which is scheduled to be eliminated for new hires in 2021—is an important tool in recruiting and retaining educators who consider this a must-have in exchange for careers in public service that are not as lucrative as private sector jobs. The General Assembly should reinstate this critical benefit.
- › **Provide principals with the support personnel they need to ensure students can learn. The demands on our principals’ time are greater than ever.** In order to achieve academic success for all their students, principals need access to myriad resources that go well beyond hiring and retaining high quality teachers. They also need to be equipped to address a student’s needs outside of the classroom, which would include supporting children’s physical and mental health, responding to the impacts of trauma and household dysfunction, and assisting with the effects of living in poverty. School safety is also an increasing area of attention for principals where the support is critical. Appropriately handling these issues demands a robust supply of support personnel, including social workers, nurses, psychologists and counselors. Our state is suffering from a severe shortage of these positions, and we call on our state’s leaders to do more to address the needs of the whole child so that they can come to the classroom ready to learn.

9

THOUGHTFULLY AND STRATEGICALLY INVEST IN SCHOOL SAFETY

Ensuring that students feel safe at school should be a top priority at the national, state, and local levels. This issue is top of mind now that children across the country report being terrified to go to school as a result of mass shootings that have, tragically, become commonplace in American society. School crime, threats, and bullying are also significant concerns. If students do not feel safe at school, they cannot learn—our leaders must carefully consider what measures are essential to ensuring that students' safety needs are met.

Discussions on school safety often include a call to “harden schools” by installing visible security measures like metal detectors, armed guards, and police officers. However, evidence suggests that these efforts may create a school environment defined by climates of fear and restricted freedom in which students actually feel less welcome, safe, and able to learn. Efforts to harden schools can also contribute to racial discipline disparities that fuel the school to prison pipeline and can deprive students of opportunities to learn by contributing to suspension, expulsion, and dropout rates among students of color.

Instead of “hardening schools,” we suggest looking at school safety through a different lens. Research supports that schools with a positive climate, where social emotional learning is integrated, have significantly less bullying and victimization and have lower threats and use of weapons.

Last year, a subcommittee in the NC House of Representatives took up the issue of school safety in the wake of the February 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida. Members convened across the state and released their final recommendations on December 6, 2018. While the committee avoided

discussing controversial topics such as gun control, they did make positive recommendations around civic responsibility education and requiring expanded first aid training for all students.

While we support the legislative committee's recommendations, more must be done regarding mental health supports for students. Our state's public schools are starved of school support personnel—social workers, nurses, psychologists and counselors—who can help address the mental health needs of our students and build key relationships. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio of psychologists to students of 1:700; in North Carolina the ratio is closer to 1 psychologist for 2,100 students. There are 13 school districts that don't have even one school psychologist employed. This trend continues for school counselors – the statewide ratio is 1:386, higher than the recommended 1:250 counselor to student ratio.

By focusing on mental health and fostering relationships, we aren't ignoring the need for investment in the physical safety of schools. It's not one or another – they should go hand-in-hand. Assessing aging school buildings and being thoughtful about the construction and renovation of public schools to ensure that they are safe learning environments for children is essential. Consider the following improvements: make classroom doors and building entrances visible from offices, ensure classroom doors have working locks, and restrict the number of doors that can be accessed by campus visitors. Taking these steps in new and current school buildings could make all the difference in certain safety situations.

More than **220,000 students** across the country have experienced gun violence at school since Columbine.

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL
PSYCHOLOGISTS RECOMMENDS A RATIO OF
PSYCHOLOGISTS TO STUDENTS OF

1 PER 700



IN NORTH CAROLINA
THE RATIO IS CLOSER TO

1 PER 2100



LOOKING AHEAD IN 2019

- › **Dramatically increase funding for and access to school-based mental health supports.** Create a multi-year plan to address the severe deficit of school social workers, nurses, psychologists and counselors. These staff members work with students in a variety of capacities to strengthen mental health services in public schools. Resources must be increased from the state to address these critical areas of support.
- › **Provide resources for school security infrastructure updates.** North Carolina's public schools have substantial needs when it comes to infrastructure. With the prospect of a school bond bill coming up during the 2019 legislative session that will begin to address a school infrastructure backlog of at least \$8 billion, we hope that this spending will include school building security updates. This is especially important for schools that have sustained devastating hurricane damage and have even greater costs to bear.
- › **Reject any efforts to arm teachers or utilize armed volunteers on campuses.** Perhaps the worst idea to come out post-Parkland school shooting were proposals to arm teachers and expect them to engage active shooters. Fortunately this idea has gained little traction in North Carolina. We should also reject proposals to utilize armed community volunteers to patrol school grounds, an idea that is being considered by some NC school districts. We believe any armed personnel at any school should be either law enforcement or a trained school resource officer.
- › **Be thoughtful about directing funds towards interventions** that research has shown to have negligible, mixed, or negative impacts on learning environments. Increasing police presence on campuses, increasing the number of school resource officers, and installing metal detectors haven't resulted in safer schools. What we have seen instead is that increased police presence in schools has resulted in an increase in law enforcement interventions when it comes to discipline, rather than using in-school suspensions or detention that wouldn't adversely affect students' entire futures. We encourage the General Assembly to consider research and best practices to guide decisions about the physical safety of schools.
- › **The elephant in the room - let's have a real conversation about gun access.** We can't fix problems if we don't talk about them. At a recent House school safety committee meeting, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Superintendent Clayton Wilcox said one student told him it's easier to get a gun than go to the library. That's a reality we cannot ignore. School shootings have tragically become a regular occurrence, causing fear and stress for students, teachers, parents and communities. Instead of training children to stop bleeding from gunshot wounds, let's have real conversations about reducing or preventing altogether children's access to guns.

10

FOCUS ON WHOLE CHILD, WHOLE DAY

The Public School Forum of NC has recognized the growing body of research that suggests that in order for a child's brain to be able to successfully take in information and learn new things, that child must feel physically and emotionally safe and supported throughout the school day. Students who come to school hungry, are living in poverty, have just experienced a traumatic event or have an unstable home life are not in a productive state to learn.

Yet despite what we have come to understand, our state's public schools are starved of the school support personnel who can help address some of these needs. Social workers, nurses, psychologists and counselors are critical to ensuring students can succeed in the classroom, but our state has neglected to direct the necessary resources to ensure they are in place at every school, and as a result, we are seeing massive shortages of these personnel statewide. Only 45 out of our 115 school districts meet the school nurse-to-student ratio of 1:750 that is recommended by the State Board of Education in 2017, and many school districts report having three or four schools sharing just one school nurse. That's a travesty, and we must reverse course. We call on lawmakers to direct more funding to these critical positions.

In addition to increasing support personnel in schools, we believe in instilling a new model of approaching and teaching students experiencing trauma. Through our NC Resilience and Learning Project, which is in its

second year of operation, we have substantially grown our work with high poverty schools across the state where trauma is prevalent in their student populations. We use the Whole Child framework—a model that has also been adopted by the NC State Board of Education – to foster trauma-sensitive schools that will improve academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes for students. This is accomplished by emphasizing the importance of creating an enduring culture shift in how participating schools view and approach children who have adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

While the focus on in-school resources is paramount, we also believe it is crucial to acknowledge the need for high quality out-of-school time resources as well. A body of research indicates that there is a significant return on investment for both out-of-school time programs and Pre-K programs, yet our state doesn't fund either to their full potential, especially in the areas of our state that need these programs the most. There is a \$9 return on every \$1 invested in afterschool programs because they improve students' academic performance, increase students' earning potential, and ultimately reduce crime and welfare costs. Additionally, afterschool and summer programs can add 1,080 hours of academic enrichment to a child's year, equivalent to the number of hours in 144 school days. Despite the overwhelming evidence for out-of-school time programs, our state currently does not have recurring funding specific to out-of-school time programs. Within North Carolina, two thirds of

6 in 10 INDIVIDUALS

HAVE AT LEAST ONE ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE (ACE). THIS STATISTIC ALONE TELLS US THAT MANY CHILDREN WITH ACES ARE SITTING IN OUR CLASSROOMS.





children do not have access to an afterschool program but would be enrolled in one were it available to them.

North Carolina has made great progress in early childhood education but there is still much more work to be done. Building on previous investments, the General Assembly authorized an expansion of NC Pre-K in February 2018 with House Bill 90. NC Pre-K is a nationally recognized, state-funded program that aims to enhance school readiness for at-risk four-year-olds from low-income families. Along with changing the class size mandate, House Bill 90 added \$82 million in 2019-20 and \$91 million in 2020-2021

to increase the number of NC Pre-K slots. However, just a few months later in June 2018, the NC General Assembly siphoned away \$50 million of new federal funding that was intended to help more working families afford high-quality child care to use for other purposes. The 2018 budget continued a disappointing trend of using federal dollars to supplant state investment. Similar to the return on investment for afterschool programs there is anywhere from a \$4 to \$9 return on investment for every dollar invested in early childhood programs.

Research indicates that there is a **\$9 return on every \$1 invested in afterschool programs.**

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2019

- › **Dramatically increase funding for and access to school-based mental health supports.** We echo our school safety recommendation to create a multi-year plan to address the severe deficit of school social workers, nurses, psychologists and counselors.
- › **Invest in training for trauma-sensitive schools and classrooms.** The Forum's Resilience and Learning Project has made great progress since its pilot year in 2017-18. We are continuing to expand this work and added 16 schools in 2018-19 to the project. With increased support, we hope to bring this model to more schools across North Carolina.
- › **Expand access to out-of-school programs, especially in rural communities and for low-income youth.** It is imperative that the state provide resources and support for the development and sustainability of out-of-school programs in rural communities, as well as for low-income youth. Low-income youth experience 6,000 fewer hours of enrichment and academic learning than their more affluent peers by the eighth grade. The General Assembly appropriated \$6 million in 2018-19 (non-recurring) to the Extended Learning and Integrated Student Supports (previously the After-School Quality Improvement Grant Program) from the at-risk allotment. We need additional funding to expand access for our most at-risk students in our most at-risk communities.
- › **Expand access to early childhood education through universal Pre-K.** Education for all children must start before kindergarten—and the NC General Assembly has recognized this need with increased investments for NC Pre-K that have opened up more spots for children waiting to enroll. However, instead of reducing the waitlist, we encourage lawmakers to eliminate it entirely by providing universal Pre-K for all of North Carolina's children.

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